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Theresa Catalano

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, tcatalano2@unl.edu

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BARACK OBAMA: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF HIS PHILADELPHIA SPEECH¹

Theresa Catalano

Department of Second Language Acquisition and Teaching,
University of Arizona

ABSTRACT

In this paper, Barack Obama's March 18, 2008 Philadelphia speech is examined from the perspectives of Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis incorporating a theoretical framework from Social Identity Theory including models of metaphorical analysis from Semiao and Masci (1996), Santa Ana (1999), and semiotic analysis of political discourse from Umberto Eco's "linguaggio politico" (1973). Jakobson's functions of signs (context, contact, code, addresser, addressee, and message) provide a basis for the analysis, which examines each function in detail. Emphasis is placed on the message of the speech by analyzing metaphors and metonyms ranging from "unity is nourishment" to "anger is a distraction," which form the dichotomy of *unity vs. division*. In addition, analysis of pronouns and other deixis reveal the way signs are used by groups in power (or those struggling to gain power) to show a contrast between *us* and *them*. Moreover, through metaphorical analysis and the semiotic analysis of signs within the text, the author exposes underlying meanings not readily accessible to the average listener and affirms our right as citizens to deconstruct and demystify coded messages in political discourse.

Keywords: Barack Obama, Semiotics, Critical Discourse Analysis, metaphor, positive "us" negative "them"

INTRODUCTION

According to Charles Sanders Peirce, "The entire universe is immersed in signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs" (Nöth, 1990, p. 41). Peirce defines a *sign* as anything that

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stands for something in some respect or capacity, and argues that a sign does not function as a sign unless it can be understood as a sign. Groups in power (or struggling to gain or maintain power) use signs as part of a way to create socially shared models representing whole groups and cultures to help them express and persuasively convey a contrast between *us* and *them* (van Dijk, 1993, p. 263). This paper will combine Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis to examine Barack Obama's now famous speech given on March 18, 2008, entitled "We the people, in order to form a more perfect union..." In addition, Critical Discourse Analysis will be employed in order to examine how groups in power, such as, the Democrats and Republicans construct social models of the other groups, and how they receive, decode, and send messages to/from other groups in power in a struggle to gain or maintain dominance.

Following the presentation of the theoretical framework from which this paper hails, the paper will be divided into sections incorporating Jakobson's functions of language (1990) to examine the speech first from the side of the addresser (the position the text constructs as its source or where it says it's from) (Thwaites, Davies and Mules, 2002, p. 16). Secondly, the addressee (the position the text constructs as its destination) will be explored followed by the contact (the physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and addressee) (p. 17). Finally, the context in which the text operates along with the code and message of the discourse will be examined focusing particular attention on metaphors, metonyms and pronoun use in order to reveal the underlying message the speaker really wishes to convey.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to provide an in-depth multi-layered analysis of Obama's speech, several theories and perspectives will be applied such as Social Identity Theory, Social Semiotics, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) is rooted in social psychology and gives us a foundation with which we can begin to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. This theory posits that we put ourselves and others into categories and groups. We compare other groups with our groups and develop a favorable bias toward the group to which we belong, ultimately desiring our group to be distinct from and positively compared to other groups (Oktar, 2001, p. 313). Many studies have shown how the use of pronouns and other deixis in political discourse can accomplish the ultimate goal of representing a positive *us* and negative *them* for political purposes (De Fina, 1995; Maitland, K. and Wilson, J., 1987; Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990; Oktar, 2001; Petersoo, 2007). This paper will demonstrate how Obama's speech is another clear example of how this is accomplished. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, Semiotics is "A science that studies the life of signs in society..." (Nöth, 1990, p. 57). Social Semiotics expands on Saussure's founding insights by exploring the implications of the fact that the "codes" of language and communication are formed by social processes. This implies that meanings and semiotic systems are shaped by relations of power,

and that as power shifts in society, our languages and other systems of socially accepted meanings can change (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p. 2).

A related critical perspective in conducting scholarship additionally employed in the analysis of political discourse is that of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth referred to as CDA). Historically, CDA has been heavily influenced by critical theorists such as Marx, the Frankfurt School, and Habermas (Agger, 1991; Tyson, 2006; van Dijk, 2001, as cited in Meadows, 2009) and its origins can be identified in the convergence of three settings: academic, historical, and ideological (Guerrero, 2009). In CDA analysis, one can "find a wide variety of theories ranging from microsociological perspectives (Ron Scollon) to theories on society and power in Michel Foucault's tradition (Siegfried Jäger, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak), theories of social cognition (Teun van Dijk) and grammar, as well as individual concepts that are borrowed from larger theoretical traditions" (Meyer, 2001, p. 18). Although the approaches mentioned above have their own distinct features, much of their methods and theoretical basis overlap. Therefore, it is not unusual to encounter research incorporating several approaches and theoretical traditions together along with Semiotics. Some examples (to name just a few) of successful research that combines various CDA approaches with Semiotics are Khosravini, 2010; Kitis and Milapides, 1997; Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2009; Oktar, 2001; Santa Ana, 1999; and Smith and Waugh, 2008.

Because CDA analysts explicitly define and defend their own sociopolitical position, it is in essence discourse analysis 'with an attitude' (van Dijk, 2001, p. 96). CDA focuses on social problems and in particular, the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse, domination, and the struggle for power. CDA analysts are primarily interested and motivated by current social issues, and claim to be agents of change. Therefore, they take the perspective of dominated groups (those who need it most) to support their struggle against inequality. Moreover, looking at text through a critical discourse analysis framework can help us to study the connections between language, power, and ideology, as well as denaturalize how social structures determine properties of discourse (Fairclough, 1995, p. 27). CDA requires integrated analysis at all levels and dimensions, and must be multidisciplinary in nature. CDA often encompasses the areas of social psychology, history, ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and many other disciplines.

In regards to this analysis, both Semiotics and CDA perspectives are particularly relevant and work in tandem with Social Identity Theory to explain and uncover linguistic strategies, such as pronoun use and metaphor in regards to the overall message of the speech. Additionally, the CDA perspective is particularly applicable because of Obama's use of the speech as part of his struggle to gain and maintain power as a presidential candidate and future president.

Another prerequisite to analyzing Obama's speech is in understanding the functions of political discourse in general, through examination of other analyses, both semiotic and otherwise, of famous political speeches. Western political oratory has been investigated by rhetoricians who have analyzed the argumentation and imagery used by political figures from Cicero to Martin Luther King Jr. to advance their causes (Leibold, 1993). Until fairly recently, linguists have contributed little to the slew of writings analyzing political discourse. However, in the last twenty years there has been increasing interest and involvement by linguists in applying language analysis to the real-world problem of the role of speech in the political process (Anderson, 2001; Chilton, 1990, 1993, 1996; Fairclough, 1989; Kress and Hodge, 1979; Krzyzanowski and Wodak, 2009; Lakoff, 1997, 2004, 2005a; Leibold, 1993;

Oktar, 2001; Petersoo, 2007; Semino and Masci, 1996; van Dijk, 1987, 1993; Wodak 1989). Many studies have been conducted on John F. Kennedy's "Speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association" in regards to Catholicism (King, 1976; Lasky, 1962; Roehler and Cook, 1988; and Wendell and Petress, 1993). These studies are extremely relevant to this paper because of the similar context of the speeches. Like Obama, J.F.K. used this speech as a form of damage control and a chance to use the television media to connect with the public. According to Wendell and Petress (1993), Kennedy's need to face the religious issue (just as Obama needed to address the issue of "race") prompted him to deliver one of the best speeches of his political life. In such a close election (similar to that of Obama and Clinton in their candidacy for the primary), the image-making capacity of television and power of the media was used by Kennedy to respond to concerns with respect to religion. Kennedy's ability to reach the people through political discourse was one of the important factors involved in his winning the presidency (Wendell and Petress, 1993, p. 22-23).

Elena Semino and Michela Masci's (1996) metaphorical analysis of discourse by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is particularly relevant to analysis of this speech because of the similar way in which metaphor is used for political purposes. The authors argue that Berlusconi uses in his speeches clichéd metaphors, mostly drawn from football (soccer) and war – for political ends. Metaphor was an important tool for Berlusconi's justification to enter politics, which facilitated the creation of his image as a politician, and attracted votes and support for his government. Berlusconi wanted to be seen as a simple man (much like George Bush) – a man of the people who understands their needs and is prepared to speak plainly and clearly for them. Use of soccer terminology helped Berlusconi steer clear of political terminology and labels. Soccer metaphors crossed social and class barriers, and in short, metaphor in general was used by Berlusconi to simplify complexities of ideological and ethical issues and present politics as a simple domain. "Metaphors are conceptual instruments that embody otherwise remote concepts in ways that the public can readily understand" (Santa Ana, 1999, p. 195), and "...metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action..." (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; as cited in Semino and Masci, 1996, p. 244). Metaphor allows us to talk and think about one area of experience (the target domain) in terms of another (the source domain). The metaphor "He attacked every weak point in my argument", for example, allows us to think of a legal defense in terms of war (Lakoff and Johnson, 2005, p. 104). In this way, abstract, complex or unfamiliar concepts are structured in concrete, clear, and familiar ways (Semino and Masci, 1996, p. 244).

Another example can be found in Berlusconi's comment "*Scenderò in campo a guidare i miei candidati...*" (I will enter the field to lead my candidates) evoking the metaphor of soccer, something many Italians can relate to on a personal basis, to explain his entrance into the political arena (p. 249). Metaphors can also be viewed as instruments of social control that make problematic political and moral concepts readily accessible for guided evaluation to the voting public. Regardless of the context in which they are used, metaphors inevitably highlight some aspects of reality and hide others. Therefore, they can have misleading effects if their presence and operation are not recognized and challenged (Semino and Masci, 1996, p. 267).

According to Umberto Eco, metaphors and metonyms are common methods to bring the audience to view reality the way the speaker views it. Another use of figurative language is in

what Eco refers to as *sopraffazione verbale* or verbal overpowering² (Eco, 1973, p. 105). This can be divided into two cases; those who know what they mean, but want only certain people to know (Clinton), and those who do not know what they mean, and try to mask this fact under rhetorical accumulation (Rumsfeld)³. Additionally, political discourse can be used to send a coded message from one specific group to another sub-group. The sender and receiver understand each other perfectly, but the intention is for the wider audience to misinterpret the message as a promise, threat, negation, or consensus (p. 104). These messages are not intended to be understood by the general public in order to be passed from one group of power to another, and can sometimes lead listeners to believe they are being deceived. However, we are not defenseless against this type of strategy, as Eco asserts. "Political discourse that substitutes declarative persuasiveness with magic formulas and secret codes represents a linguistic and civil reality that every democratic community must deconstruct through the process of demystification" (p. 105).

CONTEXT

From a Semiotic viewpoint a *text* can be defined as a combination of signs that transmits some form of message (Thwaites, Davies, and Mules, 2002, p. 77). The context of the message is the general subject that the message is about, and what the speaker is referring to. The context in which the text operates is extremely important in interpreting the message correctly, particularly because the meanings of signs change according to the context. Barack Obama's March 18, 2008 Philadelphia speech, entitled "We the people, in order to form a more perfect union..." was given in reaction to videos and discussion of the videos of incendiary comments about the United States by Obama's pastor, Jeremiah Wright, who among other things accused the country of bringing on the Sept. 11 attacks by spreading terrorism. Although this speech is referred to as his speech "on race", one of its main functions is that of "damage control." "Obama's Pastor Problem," is not necessarily about race, but rather patriotism, and the issue of supporting and being associated with someone who makes anti-American comments (Klein, 2008). Like everything else about the speech, the timing and location are not arbitrary.

Given on March 18, 2008, a little over a month away from his next important primary, it is no coincidence that he addressed this issue in Pennsylvania. While Pennsylvania may not have been the deciding state in his securing the nomination for the Democratic Party it was the next primary, and definitely an important state for Obama to win. Moreover as a former professor of Constitutional Law and civil rights lawyer, Obama understood the political and

² The word "sopraffazione" could be translated as overbearing, outsmarting, overwhelming, or overpowering. Overpowering seemed to be the most relevant translation regarding the context of politics.

³ This refers to Clinton's statement, "there is not a sexual relationship, an improper sexual relationship or any other kind of improper relationship," which he defended as truthful because of the use of the present tense, famously arguing "it depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is (Rowe, 2008). Another example is Donald Rumsfeld's famous speech in response to the question from a journalist regarding reports that there was no evidence of a direct link between Baghdad and terrorist organizations; "There are known knowns, there are things we know we know, we also know there are known unknowns, that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know, but there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know" (for video see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiPe1OiKQk>).

historical significance of Philadelphia where the constitution was written “eventually signed, but ultimately unfinished” – in selection of the site for the speech. The location of the Constitution Center then became a symbol of the union of America and its incompleteness and imperfection, thus, the title of the speech “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union.” Pennsylvania could also be seen as a symbol of 9/11 due to the fact that one of the planes involved in 9/11 crashed there. Obama used the context of Philadelphia not only as a symbol of his solidarity with Pennsylvanians, but also as proof of his patriotism. Finally, in the more micro-context, the backdrop of Obama’s speech is noteworthy in that while standing at the podium, Obama was situated in the middle of many American flags. This ensured that every camera angle placed on Obama included a view of him and a flag. The flags were conveniently and strategically placed as subtle reminders of the “patriotism” issue that Obama wished to address.⁴

CONTACT

The *contact* is the physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee. The method of contact for Obama’s speech is through a live audience (at the Philadelphia Constitution Center), but most people viewed the speech on television or via YouTube and other sites. Usually in political discourse, a particular audience is targeted. For example, if a politician is addressing members of a car company union, the speech will have an entirely different tone and message than a speech given to a group of environmental activists. A good politician must try to reach as many different groups of voters as possible, so it is inevitable that the message will vary from group to group. An interesting problem arises when (as in the case of Barack Obama’s speech) a politician must address a particular issue on television (or the internet) because immediately the audience becomes very broad, and somehow the message must reach a wide variety of potential voters and opponents. As Umberto Eco noted (1973, p. 97), when political arguments are put on T.V. they become homogenous because they have to try to reach a broader audience.

Political discourse from parties varying greatly in platforms all tend to sound amazingly similar in televised speeches. Orators on T.V. tend to dull the points to make them accessible to all and tend to use more common knowledge terminology. The same is true for the internet. The Internet enabled 5.5 million people to view Obama’s speech in the first month after it was available on www.youtube.com.

In fact, Obama used his speech on YouTube almost as a commercial for his campaign, and as a formidable funding device that turned the Web into a source of renewable energy (Alter, 2008, p. 33). TV and the Internet also provided a successful venue for damage control for Obama, and it has recently become more popular for politicians to attempt political damage control via TV and the Internet (i.e. Sarah Palin and John McCain on *Saturday Night Live*).

⁴ This refers to criticism of Obama for not wearing a United States flag pin on his lapel like many other candidates competing against him.

THE ADDRESSER

The addresser of a text is the position the text constructs as its source, that is, where it says it is from. The sender is its *actual* source (Thwaites, Davies, and Mules, 2002, p. 16). This is an important distinction as often the two are not the same. Obama himself could be considered a text, in which everything about him signifies something, from his name to his genetic makeup. Son of a white mother from Kansas and a black father from Kenya, Barack Obama himself was understood to be a symbol (as part of the campaign strategy) for the uniting of black and white; an embodiment of racial harmony. Barack was given his father's name – a Muslim name meaning, “blessed”. As a child, he was called “Barry”; the name his father had chosen for himself in order to help him assimilate into American culture (Obama, 1995, p. 96). It was not until he went to college that his real quest for identity began. Perhaps it was his need to be taken seriously, or as a rebellion against the compromises Blacks and others were expected to make in a White-dominated society that caused him to revert to his birth name (Bartholet, 2008, p. 26). No one knows for sure when “Barry” became “Barack”, but this name change symbolizes a political and social awakening, a search for his place in the African-American community, and his own identity as a son of an African immigrant and a white American (Bartholet, 2008, p. 26). A major component of his campaign was the belief that the very essence of Barack Obama, and what he stood for, would enable him to pull the country together. As a relative newcomer to Washington, he stood for change, something his campaign adopted as his slogan. However, what exactly this sign of “change” signified was rather ambiguous, and needed to be clarified further in the future in order to strengthen his candidacy.

Barack Hussein Obama's name is also a sign. Right-wing groups took advantage of the Obama/Osama (as in Bin Laden) sound similarity to exploit the iconicity of his name in full force, indirectly implanting fears into the hearts of patriotic terror-fearing Americans across the country. As soon as Obama's candidacy seemed to gain momentum, e-mails began circulating in conservative circles designed to capitalize on the name and its alleged connection to Muslim terrorists. This was done at a time when many conservative Americans knew too little about Obama to question the misinformation being sent out, and in a post-9/11 era, it proved too easy to use the name “Barack Obama” as proof of his so-called radical Muslim agenda.

As the campaign pushed on, and he began to lead in the delegate count, the idea of race had still not been discussed publicly by Obama. Many people felt that it needed to be addressed, but Obama insisted on not being the “black” candidate. He wanted to run on his policies, his reputation, and his qualities as a candidate. Obama's plan was derailed on March 13, 2008 when video clips emerged of Obama's pastor, Jeremiah Wright in earlier sermons shouting “God damn America!” and calling 9/11 a case of “America's chickens...coming home to roost” (The trouble with uncles, 2008, p. 31). Clip after clip emerged on www.youtube.com seeming to prove that all the conservative fears of an America-bashing, terrorist-loving Obama were true. At this point, Obama had no choice but to address the issue directly and immediately, in order to salvage his campaign before it was too late. His response to this crisis was his March 18, 2008 speech, “*We the people, in order to form a more perfect union.*”

ADDRESSEE

The addressee of a text is the position the text constructs as its destination (as opposed to the receiver, which is the *actual* destination) (Thwaites, Davies, and Mules, 2002, p. 17). The producer of a message takes into account the recipient (or addressee) of the message for it to function as intended. Obama's speech was given on T.V., where there were multiple addressees; Pennsylvania voters, all voters, and potential voters, as well as opponents. As Superstructuralists would have us believe (Hodge, 2003, p. 255), sometimes it is necessary to see the world through a grain of sand. Small comments seemingly tossed at random into the speech reveal much about the true message regarding whom Obama is trying to reach. Here are some of those comments and what they tell us about who Obama is addressing.

The following remarks are direct appeals to the Judeo-Christian dominant paradigm in the United States:

(1) Absolutely - just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priest, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed.

(2) The man I met more than 20 years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith.

(3) In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more and nothing less than what all the world's great religions demand - that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, scripture tells us.

(4) I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones.

The main purpose of these comments is to dispel doubts and misunderstandings about Obama's faith. In (2), (3), and (4), he is definitely marking himself as a Christian, using his quotes from scripture as a sign of his faith. In (1), he is calling out to the various religions to let them know they are included in his vision. Interestingly enough, the only reference to Hindu's, Buddhists, and Muslims, other than his comment on "perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam" (to be discussed later, in example (5)), is example (3), where he addresses all the world's great religions. He is, therefore, targeting those religions mentioned explicitly - Christians and Jews.

There is no reference to atheists; thus, one can assume they are not addressed explicitly in this speech. Also, Obama seems to be continually making the point that he is Christian, and therefore, not Muslim, thus appealing to those voters that might be influenced by the inaccurate accounts of his religious background. Like J.F.K in his speech on Catholicism, Obama is clarifying his religious status as it relates to his electability. Example (5) below is an excellent example of Eco's idea of sending coded messages from one group to another.

(5) Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country - a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.

Here, in a very quick aside, almost unnoticed by most listeners, Obama is speaking to Israel and the Jewish community in the United States and abroad. It is no secret that many important members of the African American community, such as Louis Farakkhan, have expressed anti-Semitic views in the past. Now that Obama has been associated with a pastor infamous for incendiary comments, whether Wright has made anti-Semitic comments or not, he will be associated with all those who have. Obama uses this speech, as in example (5), to encode messages to the Jewish community that he is with them, not against them. Another target of this statement are those responsible for sending and spreading e-mail propaganda stating that Obama has a Muslim terrorist agenda. By stating "*perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam*" he is talking directly to the Republican Party and their attacks on his religious affiliation, as well as their fear mongering tactics. He is sending a clear message, "I am against radical Islamic terrorism." Using the pronoun "they" together with his statement of "*perverse and hateful ideologies*" he is distancing himself linguistically from those who have distorted views.

Another important addressee of this speech is the African American community. In the United States, the terms "black" and "African American" are interchangeable, and both socially acceptable terms depending on the context, addresser, and addressee. Besides Obama's stylistic aim to avoid repetition of the same term, these two terms perhaps demonstrate an appeal to the black community in an attempt to reach out to addressees of varying political sensitivity and to be inclusive to as many different types of voters as possible.

(6) I am married to a black American...

(7)...we built a coalition of African Americans...

(8)...not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.

(9)...stories of ordinary black people...

(10)...the black community in its entirety.

(11) But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist between the African American community and the larger American community today...

Obama addresses civil rights activists by using metaphors and other figurative language as seen in the following examples:

(12) What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part – through protests and struggles, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience, and always at great risk – to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

(13) ...to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America.

Obama addresses Latinos by using the term "Hispanics" three times, "Latinos" once (as with African Americans, both terms are considered politically correct), and "brown" once; Native American; and Asian voters in the following statements:

(14)...problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

(15) This time, we want to talk about the crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children and Asian children and Hispanic children and Native American children.

(16) This time we want to talk about how the lines in the emergency room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care...

(17) ...or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally.

(18)...not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.

Obama reaches out to the white middle class in the following examples:

(19) In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. ...They've worked hard all their lives, many times to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pensions dumped after a lifetime of labor.

Immigrant communities are also addressed several times during the speech in order to legitimize them.

(20) Their experience is the immigrant experience – as far as they're concerned, no one handed them anything.

(21) ...the immigrant trying to feed his family.

Obama also appeals to the youth of America:

(22) ...what gives me the most hope is the next generation – the young people whose attitudes and beliefs and openness to change have already made history in this election.

According to Jakobson (1990, p. 73), orientation toward the *addressee*, such as in the preceding examples, is conative, and finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative. While the examples do not give a clear command to the groups being addressed, implicitly there is the sense of "you are included in my vision, therefore, you must vote for me." The very fact that their names or reference to them were included in the speech is a recognition that they exist, and are therefore important. These references should not be underestimated in the overall power of the message of the discourse.

MESSAGE

Generally, a message proceeds from an addresser or sender to an addressee or receiver, and is dependent on the contact, code, and context. Messages are communicated through a code that involves connections of meanings along with an organization pattern of the discourse as a whole (Jakobson, 1960). By looking at the figurative devices in the speech, one can grasp a better understanding of the different layers of the discourse underneath the rhetoric. Obama's rhetorical style is not significantly different from many successful politicians of the past, such as J.F.K. mentioned earlier in this paper. He includes all the essential rhetorical elements of a successful political speech such as:

Repetition:

(23) This time we want to talk about how the lines in the emergency room...

(24) This time we want to talk about the shuttered mills....

(25) This time we want to talk about the men and women...

Personal examples:

(26) There is one story in particular that I'd like to leave you with today – a story I told...speaking on Dr. King's birthday at his home church...There is a young, 23-year-old white woman named Ashley Baia who....

Political-economic "hot issues":

(27)...how the lines in the emergency room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care...

(28) The real problem is not that someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the Corporation you work for will ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit.

(29)...and the homes for sale...

Intertextuality:

(30) In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more and nothing less than what all the world's great religions demand – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, scripture tells us.

Another device commonly used in political speeches is deixis (use of words such as that, this, them, us, here, there used for purposes of positioning groups in a power structure). According to Maitland and Wilson (1987), politicians often use pronouns to express their own ideological views, but also their opposition to ideological views of others they disagree with (p. 495). In particular, Maitland and Wilson demonstrated that when *I* and *we* are functionally contrasted, they allow the politician to present him/herself as part of a party or

people, and to show solidarity with a particular ideological paradigm, while at the same time being seen as detached or outside of the group (p. 508). Obama's speech displays this technique in the following examples:

(31) I chose to run for president at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction – toward a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

(32) But I have asserted a firm conviction – a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people – that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.

As a general outline, the speech follows a pattern of beginning with I to introduce Obama and his views and moving to we to include the American people in his campaign. Another use of deixis in this speech serves to categorize Obama, his campaign, and the American people that want change as *us* vs. *his opponents* and those who don't vote for him as *them*. Otkar (2001) explains this technique as rooted in Social Identity Theory, and in particular, Self-categorization Theory (Turner et al, 1987). Self-categorization Theory holds that people's goals and motivations play an important role in determining which category people will fall into (*us* vs. *them*), and "thus, 'us' is generally self-evaluated as holding better values that are particularly relevant to us, whereas they are perceived as 'bad' in the process of social comparison" (Otkar, 2001, p. 319). This idea of "us" and "them" is based on the general principle that whatever values and principles we share; they do not have them (van Dijk, 1998, p. 291). The following examples exhibit the representation of a positive us:

(33) Throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country...we built a powerful coalition of African Americans and white Americans.

Here again, in example (34), Obama includes references to his faith joined in the same sentence with the American people, and represents another example of the above mentioned technique from Maitland and Wilson (1987).

(34) But I have asserted a firm conviction – a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people – that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.

By including himself (with the pronoun *we*), in example (35), Obama is implying that America will change with his guidance.

(35) But what we know – what we have seen – is that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What we have already achieved gives us hope – the audacity to hope – for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

The next examples present a negative them by using Reverend Wright as a symbol of those who preach division. Although Obama specifically states that he cannot disown Rev. Wright, his use of pronouns and negative adjectives to describe Wright's actions do just that, creating linguistic distance between the two.

(36) But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change.

(37) The profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static...

(38) As such, Reverend Wright's comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems ...

(39) But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America – to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality.

Although Obama uses many different techniques and devices throughout the discourse, two semiotic devices dominate the message of this speech; the metaphor and the metonym. Traditionally, metaphors and metonymies have been regarded as figures of speech in literary analyses, but philosophers and cognitive linguists have shown that metaphors and metonymies are powerful cognitive tools for our conceptualization of abstract categories (Ungerer and Schmid, 2006). After analyzing Obama's speech for examples of metaphors and metonyms, an overarching theme of a dichotomy began to appear. This dichotomy reveals itself in the form of unity vs. division. Within the theme of unity, the metaphor of change as a journey, and the idea that the future is better appears by using verbs of motion to show how we must move forward in order to progress and improve race relations. This also dovetails with Obama's campaign slogan of "Change" and "Yes we can". The following are examples of metaphors under the theme of UNITY:

The future is a journey:

(40) We want to move in the same direction...toward a better future for our children and grandchildren.

(41) ...and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.

(42) But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change.

(43) But I have asserted a firm conviction – a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people – that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds...

(44) Continue the long march...for a more just; more equal more free, more caring and more prosperous America.

Unity is nourishment:

(45) American people are hungry for this message of unity.

Included in the theme of unity, both metaphors and metonyms compare race relations to the constitution – an unfinished document needing to be completed. It is a rough draft needing to be modified which implies progress. The following examples demonstrate this idea:

(46) I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together, unless we perfect our union...

(47) ...a constitution that promised its people liberty and justice and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

(48) This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected.

(49) It is where our union grows stronger. And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the 221 years since a band of patriots signed that document right here in Philadelphia that is where the perfection begins.

The speech also contains many metaphors that include the idea of DIVISION, portrayed as the negative “other” that Obama wants to disassociate from.

(50)... this too widens the racial divide and blocks the path to understanding.

(51) They are anxious about their futures, and they feel their dreams slipping away.

(52) But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation.

Example (53) is extremely significant for those who can decipher the code (Christians or those with knowledge of Christianity). Obama includes this metaphor several times in his book – *The Audacity of Hope*, and several times during his speech. Here he is declaring we must take the blame and move forward, not backward. This metaphor also carries with it a strong emotional impact on the audience, and “naturalizes” it as part of our human nature that we must overcome and be washed clean, just as baptism for Christians washes away original sin.

(53) It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery ...

Example (54) clearly indexes boxing, to help the audience visualize the idea of the fight of UNITY vs. DIVISION. In this case, participants return to their corners in between rounds, just as they would if the issue of race had not been addressed now.

(54) If we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together.

Obama also connects division and distraction with anger in the following example:

(55) ...distracts attention from solving real problems; it keeps us from squarely facing our own complicity with the African-American community in our condition, and prevents the African-American community from forging the alliances it needs...

In example (56), Obama is referring to the code of a black private space where it is okay to express/vent, a code that whites don't get.

(56) That anger may not get expressed in public, in front of white co-workers or white friends. But it does find voice in the barbershop or the beauty shop or around the kitchen table.

He later refers to anger from the white community and states that "Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren't always expressed in polite company." He also builds on the theme that anger is a distraction from real culprits, those to blame. He is essentially calling them out and reassigning blame. That is, black anger and white resentment keep us from uniting against the real enemy. In example (57), Obama is sending a message to his opponents. He is blaming the Republican Party and the Bush administration for the economic policies that benefit the wealthy, and widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. Here, he also separates himself linguistically from Washington, and includes himself as part of the resistance to failed power.

(57) Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle-class squeeze – a cooperate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices and short-term greed: a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many.

The most salient metonym in the speech is Obama himself. In the following examples, Obama is portrayed as a mosaic made up of different pieces rather than a melting pot. His own body is divided up into sections donated from a white grandmother to a black pastor, to an immigrant father and white mother. These are all part of who he is, just as they constitute part of his identity, they make up part of this country. Just as this nation is made up of many, so is Obama made up of many different genetic backgrounds merged into one united being.

(58) I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.

(59) It hasn't made me the most conventional of candidates. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts – that out of many, we are truly one.

(60) These people are a part of me. (Syllogism)

(61) And they are part of America, this country that I love. (Syllogism)

Lastly, the speech includes metonyms involving the black church as representing the black community and adds to his argument as to why he cannot disown Rev. Wright (although he does anyway, as shown previously in examples 36-39).

(62) Trinity embodies the black community in its entirety.

(63) The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and yes, the bitterness and biases that make up the black experience in America.

CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of this speech lies in the way that Obama plays on the emotional impact of the issue of race in a motion to salvage his political campaign and compel Americans to vote for him. Obama uses metaphor, metonym, and deixis to place himself at the forefront of the struggle against racism, and ultimately, the resistance to the current (at the time of the speech) administration. Although the issue of race in America was mentioned frequently in his speech, the overarching message was that of *UNITY* vs. *DIVISION* (us against them), and a choice to be made between the two. While the explicit message is to unite, the implicit message is to do this by electing him. Obama supports this message by his use of metaphors and metonyms, by pronoun choice, and by categorizing various elements as belonging to one or the other category. While potential voters tune in to see his reaction to criticism of his involvement with Rev. Wright, through figurative language, Obama manages to turn the issues around and shift topics. He and his speech writers remained very much in control of what he was going to talk about and what not, framing the speech to deliver the message they wanted to send, not necessarily what they were asked to deliver.

Also, essential to understanding the structure of this speech is Umberto Eco's idea of sending coded messages within specific groups of power. By indexing specific groups, such as Jews, youth, civil right's activists, Hispanics, Asians, etc., Obama tried to reach as many potential voters as possible. He also sent messages to Hillary Clinton, John McCain, the Bush Administration, and the Republican Party in general. Those messages were that his candidacy would not be terminated so easily due to one scandal. His use of deixis puts implicit blame on the Republican Party and the Bush administration by using "Washington" and the "real culprits" in the same sentence. By referring to it as "a Washington" (example (57)) instead of *our* Washington, he manages to place it in the category of "other." He is sending a message to his supporters that he is not part of Washington – he is an outsider, thus, representing change. From Cicero to J.F.K. to Berlusconi, throughout history, political figures have been substituting declarative persuasiveness with magic formulas and secret codes to achieve their

goal of reaching the people. Explicit language is made implicit, and in the case of Obama, a discussion of one issue (race) is really a chance to discuss another ("vote for me"). Thus, in this sense, Obama is not much different than many successful politicians of the past. Viewing this speech from a semiotic and critical lens allows us to see its full power. Not only is discourse analysis, and in particular, Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis, a useful tool in revealing the underlying message in the discourse, but it is our right and duty as citizens and academics to make this information available to the public and help others see the value and power of persuasive rhetoric.

APPENDIX

Transcript of Barack Obama's speech "We the people in order to form a more perfect union" Retrieved August 11, 2009 from: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88478467>

March 18, 2008

The following is a transcript of the remarks of Democratic Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, delivered March 18, 2008, in Philadelphia at the Constitution Center. In it, Obama addresses the role race has played in the presidential campaign. He also responds to criticism of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, an unpaid campaign adviser and pastor at Obama's Chicago church. Wright has made inflammatory remarks about the United States and has accused the country of bringing on the Sept. 11 attacks by spreading terrorism.

"We the people, in order to form a more perfect union ..." — 221 years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, a group of men gathered and, with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy. Farmers and scholars, statesmen and patriots who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.

The document they produced was eventually signed but ultimately unfinished. It was stained by this nation's original sin of slavery, a question that divided the colonies and brought the convention to a stalemate until the founders chose to allow the slave trade to continue for at least 20 more years, and to leave any final resolution to future generations.

Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution — a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty and justice and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part — through protests and struggles, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience, and always at great risk — to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this presidential campaign — to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for president at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together, unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction — toward a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

This belief comes from my unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people. But it also comes from my own story.

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave-owners — an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible.

It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional of candidates. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts — that out of many, we are truly one.

Throughout the first year of this campaign, against all predictions to the contrary, we saw how hungry the American people were for this message of unity. Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African-Americans and white Americans.

This is not to say that race has not been an issue in this campaign. At various stages in the campaign, some commentators have deemed me either "too black" or "not black enough." We saw racial tensions bubble to the surface during the week before the South Carolina primary. The press has scoured every single exit poll for the latest evidence of racial polarization, not just in terms of white and black, but black and brown as well.

And yet, it has only been in the last couple of weeks that the discussion of race in this campaign has taken a particularly divisive turn.

On one end of the spectrum, we've heard the implication that my candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it's based solely on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap. On the other end, we've heard my former pastor, Jeremiah Wright, use incendiary language to express views that have the potential not only to widen the racial divide, but views that denigrate both the greatness and the goodness of our nation, and that rightly offend white and black alike.

I have already condemned, in unequivocal terms, the statements of Reverend Wright that have caused such controversy and, in some cases, pain. For some, nagging questions remain. Did I know him to be an occasionally fierce critic of American domestic and foreign policy? Of course. Did I ever hear him make remarks that could be considered controversial while I sat in the church? Yes. Did I strongly disagree with many of his political views? Absolutely

— just as I'm sure many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed.

But the remarks that have caused this recent firestorm weren't simply controversial. They weren't simply a religious leader's efforts to speak out against perceived injustice. Instead, they expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country — a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.

As such, Reverend Wright's comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity; racially charged at a time when we need to come together to solve a set of monumental problems — two wars, a terrorist threat, a falling economy, a chronic health care crisis and potentially devastating climate change — problems that are neither black or white or Latino or Asian, but rather problems that confront us all.

Given my background, my politics, and my professed values and ideals, there will no doubt be those for whom my statements of condemnation are not enough. Why associate myself with Reverend Wright in the first place, they may ask? Why not join another church? And I confess that if all that I knew of Reverend Wright were the snippets of those sermons that have run in an endless loop on the television sets and YouTube, or if Trinity United Church of Christ conformed to the caricatures being peddled by some commentators, there is no doubt that I would react in much the same way.

But the truth is that isn't all that I know of the man. The man I met more than 20 years ago is a man who helped introduce me to my Christian faith, a man who spoke to me about our obligations to love one another, to care for the sick and lift up the poor. He is a man who served his country as a United States Marine; who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who for over 30 years has led a church that serves the community by doing God's work here on Earth — by housing the homeless, ministering to the needy, providing day care services and scholarships and prison ministries, and reaching out to those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

In my first book, *Dreams from My Father*, I describe the experience of my first service at Trinity:

"People began to shout, to rise from their seats and clap and cry out, a forceful wind carrying the reverend's voice up into the rafters. And in that single note — hope! — I heard something else: At the foot of that cross, inside the thousands of churches across the city, I imagined the stories of ordinary black people merging with the stories of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, the Christians in the lion's den, Ezekiel's field of dry bones. Those stories — of survival and freedom and hope — became our stories, my story. The blood that spilled was our blood, the tears our tears, until this black church, on this bright day, seemed once more a vessel carrying the story of a people into future generations and into a larger world. Our trials and triumphs became at once unique and universal, black and more than black. In chronicling our journey, the stories and songs gave us a meaning to reclaim memories that we didn't need to feel shame about — memories that all people might study and cherish, and with which we could start to rebuild."

That has been my experience at Trinity. Like other predominantly black churches across the country, Trinity embodies the black community in its entirety — the doctor and the welfare mom, the model student and the former gang-banger. Like other black churches,

Trinity's services are full of raucous laughter and sometimes bawdy humor. They are full of dancing and clapping and screaming and shouting that may seem jarring to the untrained ear. The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and, yes, the bitterness and biases that make up the black experience in America.

And this helps explain, perhaps, my relationship with Reverend Wright. As imperfect as he may be, he has been like family to me. He strengthened my faith, officiated my wedding, and baptized my children. Not once in my conversations with him have I heard him talk about any ethnic group in derogatory terms, or treat whites with whom he interacted with anything but courtesy and respect. He contains within him the contradictions — the good and the bad — of the community that he has served diligently for so many years.

I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can disown my white grandmother — a woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed her by on the street, and who on more than one occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe.

These people are a part of me. And they are part of America, this country that I love.

Some will see this as an attempt to justify or excuse comments that are simply inexcusable. I can assure you it is not. I suppose the politically safe thing to do would be to move on from this episode and just hope that it fades into the woodwork. We can dismiss Reverend Wright as a crank or a demagogue, just as some have dismissed Geraldine Ferraro, in the aftermath of her recent statements, as harboring some deep-seated bias.

But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America — to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality.

The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through — a part of our union that we have not yet made perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care or education or the need to find good jobs for every American.

Understanding this reality requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point. As William Faulkner once wrote, "The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past." We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of the disparities that exist between the African-American community and the larger American community today can be traced directly to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

Segregated schools were and are inferior schools; we still haven't fixed them, 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*. And the inferior education they provided, then and now, helps explain the pervasive achievement gap between today's black and white students.

Legalized discrimination — where blacks were prevented, often through violence, from owning property, or loans were not granted to African-American business owners, or black homeowners could not access FHA mortgages, or blacks were excluded from unions or the

police force or the fire department — meant that black families could not amass any meaningful wealth to bequeath to future generations. That history helps explain the wealth and income gap between blacks and whites, and the concentrated pockets of poverty that persist in so many of today's urban and rural communities.

A lack of economic opportunity among black men, and the shame and frustration that came from not being able to provide for one's family contributed to the erosion of black families — a problem that welfare policies for many years may have worsened. And the lack of basic services in so many urban black neighborhoods — parks for kids to play in, police walking the beat, regular garbage pickup, building code enforcement — all helped create a cycle of violence, blight and neglect that continues to haunt us.

This is the reality in which Reverend Wright and other African-Americans of his generation grew up. They came of age in the late '50s and early '60s, a time when segregation was still the law of the land and opportunity was systematically constricted. What's remarkable is not how many failed in the face of discrimination, but how many men and women overcame the odds; how many were able to make a way out of no way, for those like me who would come after them.

For all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream, there were many who didn't make it — those who were ultimately defeated, in one way or another, by discrimination. That legacy of defeat was passed on to future generations — those young men and, increasingly, young women who we see standing on street corners or languishing in our prisons, without hope or prospects for the future. Even for those blacks who did make it, questions of race and racism continue to define their worldview in fundamental ways. For the men and women of Reverend Wright's generation, the memories of humiliation and doubt and fear have not gone away; nor has the anger and the bitterness of those years. That anger may not get expressed in public, in front of white co-workers or white friends. But it does find voice in the barbershop or the beauty shop or around the kitchen table. At times, that anger is exploited by politicians, to gin up votes along racial lines, or to make up for a politician's own failings.

And occasionally it finds voice in the church on Sunday morning, in the pulpit and in the pews. The fact that so many people are surprised to hear that anger in some of Reverend Wright's sermons simply reminds us of the old truism that the most segregated hour of American life occurs on Sunday morning. That anger is not always productive; indeed, all too often it distracts attention from solving real problems; it keeps us from squarely facing our own complicity within the African-American community in our condition, and prevents the African-American community from forging the alliances it needs to bring about real change. But the anger is real; it is powerful. And to simply wish it away, to condemn it without understanding its roots, only serves to widen the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the races.

In fact, a similar anger exists within segments of the white community. Most working- and middle-class white Americans don't feel that they have been particularly privileged by their race. Their experience is the immigrant experience — as far as they're concerned, no one handed them anything. They built it from scratch. They've worked hard all their lives, many times only to see their jobs shipped overseas or their pensions dumped after a lifetime of labor. They are anxious about their futures, and they feel their dreams slipping away. And in an era of stagnant wages and global competition, opportunity comes to be seen as a zero sum game, in which your dreams come at my expense. So when they are told to bus their children

to a school across town; when they hear an African-American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced, resentment builds over time.

Like the anger within the black community, these resentments aren't always expressed in polite company. But they have helped shape the political landscape for at least a generation. Anger over welfare and affirmative action helped forge the Reagan Coalition. Politicians routinely exploited fears of crime for their own electoral ends. Talk show hosts and conservative commentators built entire careers unmasking bogus claims of racism while dismissing legitimate discussions of racial injustice and inequality as mere political correctness or reverse racism.

Just as black anger often proved counterproductive, so have these white resentments distracted attention from the real culprits of the middle class squeeze — a corporate culture rife with inside dealing, questionable accounting practices and short-term greed; a Washington dominated by lobbyists and special interests; economic policies that favor the few over the many. And yet, to wish away the resentments of white Americans, to label them as misguided or even racist, without recognizing they are grounded in legitimate concerns — this too widens the racial divide and blocks the path to understanding.

This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy — particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own.

But I have asserted a firm conviction — a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people — that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union.

For the African-American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances — for better health care and better schools and better jobs — to the larger aspirations of all Americans: the white woman struggling to break the glass ceiling, the white man who has been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family. And it means taking full responsibility for our own lives — by demanding more from our fathers, and spending more time with our children, and reading to them, and teaching them that while they may face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism; they must always believe that they can write their own destiny.

Ironically, this quintessentially American — and yes, conservative — notion of self-help found frequent expression in Reverend Wright's sermons. But what my former pastor too often failed to understand is that embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society can change.

The profound mistake of Reverend Wright's sermons is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress had been made; as if this country — a country that has made it possible for one of his own members to run for the highest office in the land and build a coalition of white and black, Latino and Asian, rich and poor, young and old — is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past. But what we know — what we have seen — is that America can change. That is the true genius of this nation. What

we have already achieved gives us hope — the audacity to hope — for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

In the white community, the path to a more perfect union means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people; that the legacy of discrimination — and current incidents of discrimination, while less overt than in the past — are real and must be addressed, not just with words, but with deeds, by investing in our schools and our communities; by enforcing our civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system; by providing this generation with ladders of opportunity that were unavailable for previous generations. It requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams; that investing in the health, welfare and education of black and brown and white children will ultimately help all of America prosper.

In the end, then, what is called for is nothing more and nothing less than what all the world's great religions demand — that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Let us be our brother's keeper, scripture tells us. Let us be our sister's keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.

For we have a choice in this country. We can accept a politics that breeds division and conflict and cynicism. We can tackle race only as spectacle — as we did in the O.J. trial — or in the wake of tragedy — as we did in the aftermath of Katrina — or as fodder for the nightly news. We can play Reverend Wright's sermons on every channel, every day and talk about them from now until the election, and make the only question in this campaign whether or not the American people think that I somehow believe or sympathize with his most offensive words. We can pounce on some gaffe by a Hillary supporter as evidence that she's playing the race card, or we can speculate on whether white men will all flock to John McCain in the general election regardless of his policies.

We can do that.

But if we do, I can tell you that in the next election, we'll be talking about some other distraction. And then another one. And then another one. And nothing will change.

That is one option. Or, at this moment, in this election, we can come together and say, "Not this time." This time, we want to talk about the crumbling schools that are stealing the future of black children and white children and Asian children and Hispanic children and Native American children. This time, we want to reject the cynicism that tells us that these kids can't learn; that those kids who don't look like us are somebody else's problem. The children of America are not those kids, they are our kids, and we will not let them fall behind in a 21st century economy. Not this time.

This time we want to talk about how the lines in the emergency room are filled with whites and blacks and Hispanics who do not have health care, who don't have the power on their own to overcome the special interests in Washington, but who can take them on if we do it together.

This time, we want to talk about the shuttered mills that once provided a decent life for men and women of every race, and the homes for sale that once belonged to Americans from every religion, every region, and every walk of life. This time, we want to talk about the fact that the real problem is not that someone who doesn't look like you might take your job; it's that the corporation you work for will ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit.

This time, we want to talk about the men and women of every color and creed who serve together and fight together and bleed together under the same proud flag. We want to talk

about how to bring them home from a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged. And we want to talk about how we'll show our patriotism by caring for them and their families, and giving them the benefits that they have earned.

I would not be running for President if I didn't believe with all my heart that this is what the vast majority of Americans want for this country. This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected. And today, whenever I find myself feeling doubtful or cynical about this possibility, what gives me the most hope is the next generation — the young people whose attitudes and beliefs and openness to change have already made history in this election.

There is one story in particular that I'd like to leave you with today — a story I told when I had the great honor of speaking on Dr. King's birthday at his home church, Ebenezer Baptist, in Atlanta.

There is a young, 23-year-old white woman named Ashley Baia who organized for our campaign in Florence, S.C. She had been working to organize a mostly African-American community since the beginning of this campaign, and one day she was at a roundtable discussion where everyone went around telling their story and why they were there.

And Ashley said that when she was 9 years old, her mother got cancer. And because she had to miss days of work, she was let go and lost her health care. They had to file for bankruptcy, and that's when Ashley decided that she had to do something to help her mom.

She knew that food was one of their most expensive costs, and so Ashley convinced her mother that what she really liked and really wanted to eat more than anything else was mustard and relish sandwiches — because that was the cheapest way to eat. That's the mind of a 9-year-old.

She did this for a year until her mom got better. So she told everyone at the roundtable that the reason she joined our campaign was so that she could help the millions of other children in the country who want and need to help their parents, too.

Now, Ashley might have made a different choice. Perhaps somebody told her along the way that the source of her mother's problems were blacks who were on welfare and too lazy to work, or Hispanics who were coming into the country illegally. But she didn't. She sought out allies in her fight against injustice.

Anyway, Ashley finishes her story and then goes around the room and asks everyone else why they're supporting the campaign. They all have different stories and different reasons. Many bring up a specific issue. And finally they come to this elderly black man who's been sitting there quietly the entire time. And Ashley asks him why he's there. And he does not bring up a specific issue. He does not say health care or the economy. He does not say education or the war. He does not say that he was there because of Barack Obama. He simply says to everyone in the room, "I am here because of Ashley."

"I'm here because of Ashley." By itself, that single moment of recognition between that young white girl and that old black man is not enough. It is not enough to give health care to the sick, or jobs to the jobless, or education to our children.

But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger. And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the 221 years since a band of patriots signed that document right here in Philadelphia that is where the perfection begins.

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